



Announcement: *The Nature of Learning* Start-Up Grants

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (Foundation), in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) National Wildlife Refuge System and the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC), The Keystone Center, and National Wildlife Refuge Association, is pleased to solicit applications from organizations interested in initiating *The Nature of Learning* in their communities. *The Nature of Learning* is the National Wildlife Refuge System's community-based environmental education initiative that seeks to:

- Use National Wildlife Refuges as outdoor classrooms to promote a greater understanding of local conservation issues;
- Encourage an interdisciplinary approach to learning that seeks to enhance student academic achievement;
- Utilize field experiences and student-led stewardship projects to connect classroom lessons to real world issues; and
- Involve a partnership among local schools, community groups, natural resource professionals and local businesses.

Grants of up to \$5,000 will be awarded on a competitive basis to support start-up expenses associated with new programs. In addition, grants up to \$3,000 will be awarded on a comprehensive basis to provide continued support to existing *Nature of Learning* Programs.

The *Nature of Learning* framework includes:

- **Partnerships:** Central to each *Nature of Learning* site is a partnership among a neighborhood school, natural resource professionals and community members. These partners use the *Nature of Learning* methodology to create site-specific goals and an action plan for achievement.
- **Integrated Learning:** The *Nature of Learning* outlines a process by which a community-based curriculum is developed utilizing formal and non-formal education expertise at the site.
- **Standards-based:** Using the standards-based curriculum from collaborating schools, teams of teachers and resource specialists blend the resources from the classroom with existing activities and programs used on public lands. The framework guides educators in a standards-based instructional process that

- encourages an interdisciplinary approach.
- Stewardship Projects- Community projects are planned and implemented as a culminating activity of this initiative. After building an understanding of conservation issues, students are encouraged to identify tasks that put their awareness into action and enhance their community.
 - Professional Development- The *Nature of Learning* framework assists site teams build local site workshops to meet professional development needs. Partnerships with local organizations who have similar missions are highly recommended. In addition, the National Conservation Training Center and the Keystone Center offer many courses that can be directly applied to the *Nature of Learning* Initiative.

The Nature of Learning supports the FWS Manual Policy (605 FW 6) as an environmental education initiative that has the ability to promote awareness, appreciation and understanding of the role that the Refuge System plays in the conservation of wildlife. As a priority use, FWS encourages environmental education within refuge missions and purposes, supports site-specific environmental education, and uses on-site programs to focus on refuge issues and emphasize species of importance. Meeting the education objectives of the Refuge System is an important goal of *The Nature of Learning* but it will take the collaboration that includes the community to achieve it.

Who should apply for *The Nature of Learning* start-up grants?

Schools or non-profit organizations, including "Friends" groups, Cooperative and Interpretive Associations, Audubon Chapters, are eligible to apply for funding. By becoming part of *The Nature of Learning* program, your community will be eligible for financial and technical assistance to help achieve the following:

- Build educational value on refuges so that visits, exposure and enthusiasm on public lands expand and continue;
- Introduce a process to enhance critical thinking skills and better prepare students as future community leaders;
- Create long-lasting relationships among teachers, local businesses, community leaders and refuge personnel; and
- Develop and nurture a strong sense of stewardship and civic pride using the refuge and community as outdoor classrooms.

To learn more about *The Nature of Learning* program, please visit <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/education/natureofLearning>

Grant Guidelines:

Programs must involve a partnership among a local school(s), community group (e.g., Refuge Support Group), and National Wildlife Refuge. Letters of support are strongly encouraged and a letter from the refuge manager is required.

- Programs must be designed to meet all of the key elements of *The Nature of Learning* framework (i.e., partnerships, integrated learning, professional development) over time. Moreover, programs must promote an understanding of local conservation

issues, improve scientific literacy, and conform to appropriate academic standards of learning.

- Programs are expected to include an outdoor classroom experience for students and teachers at a National Wildlife Refuge and must also include a community stewardship project.
- Existing conservation education programs are eligible for funding and technical assistance so long as there is a commitment to meet all of the elements of *The Nature of Learning* framework (see website for additional information on key elements).
- Preference will be given to start-up programs that can demonstrate a commitment to sustaining the program over time.
- Matching contributions are not required; however strong preference will be given to applications that leverage the grant award with contributions of funds, goods and services from project partners (see application form for additional details).
- Awards are between \$1,000 and \$5,000. Existing *Nature of Learning* programs are eligible to apply for up to \$3,000 to support continued implementation of the program for up to 3 years.
- Awarded applicants will be expected to submit a short project summary and project outcomes (i.e. photos, students' essays, etc...) for inclusion on the Nature of Learning Website.

How to apply:

Applicants should complete the attached application form, including project narrative and budget request. **Applications must be postmarked by April 17th, 2006.** Projects will be evaluated to the extent by which the above guidelines are met. Applicants will be notified of their awards by August 4, 2006. Please do not contact the Foundation before this date in regards to the status of your application.

For additional information, please contact Deborah Moore at deborah_moore@fws.gov or Kim Chumney at kmchumney@keystone.org . For questions regarded grant applications, please contact Lauren Madden at lauren.madden@nfwf.org.